

Cal/OSHA Inspections

Cal/OSHA inspectors make unannounced visits to ensure California workplaces are safe and healthy. If your business has a documented uncontrolled hazard and, as a result, receives a Cal/OSHA citation, the resulting penalties, legal issues, and lowered employee morale and publicity can have serious financial and business impacts. Managers, supervisors, and employees need to know what to expect during a Cal/OSHA inspection and how to respond appropriately.

Cal/OSHA conducts site inspections in cases of imminent danger or industrial accidents. A fatal injury to one or more employees; a serious injury or illness; a serious exposure; or the inpatient hospitalization, regardless of duration, of three (3) or more employees (a catastrophe) will trigger an accident investigation and must be reported to Cal/OSHA within 8 hours. Inspectors also focus on high-hazard work sites and industries with loss rates at or above Bureau of Labor Statistics averages.

Inspectors will also visit worksites as a response to employee complaints posing an imminent danger. At times, employee complaints may be considered low risk. These are handled with a letter reporting general information and a request to follow-up and report back within a certain time period. Conduct investigations into these complaints, gather documentation, and submit it in writing on time to the Cal/OSHA office. Note that the name of the complaining employee will be kept confidential. It is against the law to retaliate against employees for reporting safety hazards and concerns.

Cal/OSHA inspectors will present their identification and request permission from a management representative to conduct a site inspection. Instruct your receptionist and/or security personnel on which management staff should be notified of a visit. Inspectors will wait on site about one hour for management contact. They will conduct an opening conference to explain the reason for the visit. Inspection walkthroughs may include your entire facility, or a targeted work area. Inspectors have the right to walk around the building (accompanied), interview employees in private, and document hazards with photos and measurements.

When you work with an inspector, be courteous and friendly. Limit the inspection focus to only the documents and facility areas listed in the opening conference. Accompany the inspector at all times, though private employee interviews can be arranged in controlled access conference rooms. Provide neutral, fact-based answers to the inspector's questions; don't offer opinions or guess at answers. It is okay to offer follow-up at a later date. Don't argue with an inspector. Also, don't agree with comments as they may be incorrect. Don't make jokes about health and safety, worksite, or personnel matters. Keep notes, photos, and records during the visit. If the inspector takes measurements or readings, conduct the same measurements and readings simultaneously.

After the walkthrough, the inspector should conduct a closing conference to provide inspection results, next steps, and timelines. Inspectors may request protocols, work procedures, or other documents. Deadlines for submittal range between 24 hours and 14 days. The Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) may be required immediately, since it is required to be readily accessible to employees. Conduct follow-up investigations, corrective actions, and gather requested documents and provide them to the inspector by the stated deadline. Missed deadlines can result in further site inspections or citations.

Cal/OSHA inspections are unannounced. Start planning now so you can present a competent, organized, and compliant response to a Cal/OSHA inspection. Designate and train staff to respond to Cal/OSHA inspectors. Maintain your safety programs and employee training procedures at appropriate levels. Keep safety records organized and on site and ensure key staff know how to access them.

Source: Cal/OSHA website: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSHPol/P&PC-1A.HTM>